

# BILLERICAY & WICKFORD Gazette

Wednesday, February 2, 2011

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## DON'T WASTE £13m ON EVICTION – GIVE US TIME TO MOVE

Dale Farm travellers bid to avoid huge bill for taxpayers

Exclusive by Chris Richards  
[chris.richards@gazettenews.co.uk](mailto:chris.richards@gazettenews.co.uk)

TRAVELLERS living illegally at Dale Farm have urged Basildon Borough Council not to spend £13 million of taxpayers' money to evict them from the site in the spring.

Richard Sheridan, who lives at the site in Crays Hill, made his plea in an exclusive interview with the Gazette in London this week, as he headed to the House of Commons for crunch talks with Billericay's MP John Baron.

"I would hate to see £13 million of taxpayers' money wasted on an eviction when it could be put to better use," Mr Sheridan said.

### Costly

He instead urged the council to give the travellers – who are living on green belt land without planning permission – more time to find alternative sites away from Dale Farm, a move which would negate the need for a costly eviction.

Mr Sheridan, who is the president of The Gypsy Council, was joined by two other Dale Farm residents for the meeting, namely Mary-Ann McCarthy and her daughter Kathleen McCarthy.

Kathleen said the occupants of the site accepted that they had breached planning regulations and said they were willing to leave, provided they could find somewhere else to go.

She also stressed that no-one wanted a potential eviction to descend into violence.

"We always said we would leave peacefully if we have somewhere to



**CRISIS TALKS:** Representatives of the Dale Farm travellers on their way to the House of Commons to meet MP John Baron  
MPCMMR20110127A-059.C

go," she told the Gazette.

At Thursday's meeting, Tony Ball, the leader of Basildon Borough Council, said the authority would be willing to consider an application to provide a site for some of the travellers at Dale Farm elsewhere in the borough.

However, he stressed that the majority would need to move out of the Basildon area and could not give the traveller delegation a figure of how many could stay locally.

Speaking after the two-hour meet-

ing, Kathleen said it would be difficult for families who have lived at the site for so long to part company.

"How can one half say yes (to leaving the site) and watch the other half suffer?" she said.

Basildon Borough Council is committed to removing the travellers from Dale Farm in the spring and, along with Essex Police, is seeking £13 million from the Government to cover the potential costs of such an operation.

For more on this story see p5



**PROTEST:** High St retailers are fighting the new parking plans

**Council is unanimous in parking group snub**

IN PROTEST at new parking measures set to be put in place across the Billericay and Wickford area, Basildon Council has rejected the opportunity to join a parking partnership.

The council's cabinet voted unanimously not to become a member of a new group set to take over on-street parking on behalf of Essex County Council in April.

Proposals to standardise on-street resident parking would see High Street pay and display machines introduced in Billericay – a move which the council will not endorse.

### Increase fees

The partnership would also increase fees for the borough's residential parking permits by more than 100 per cent.

Councillor Malcolm Buckley, cabinet member for environment, said: "We will monitor the progress of the partnership. We will also continue to maintain 'off-street' parking so that we can continue to consider the free weekend parking that is so important to the economic vitality of our town centres."

Councillor Phil Turner, cabinet member for resources, said: "The increases in parking permits are excessive and this is going against the localism agenda of the Government. We cannot get involved in a consortium that is proposing this to our residents."



**FACING CLOSURE:** The traveller site at Dale Farm in Crays Hill

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# Crunch talks on Dale Farm future hosted at Commons

Parties get round the table to find an alternative to £13m eviction

Exclusive by Chris Richards  
newsdesk@gazetteneews.co.uk

TRAVELLERS, politicians and residents came together this week for crunch talks on the future of Dale Farm, the largest illegal gypsy site in Europe.

Residents from the site, in Crays Hill, met Billericay's MP John Baron and Tony Ball, the leader of Basildon Borough Council, in a bid to avoid the misery of a £13 million forced eviction this spring.

The traveller delegation, representing the 86 families who currently live at Dale Farm without planning permission, was led by Richard Sheridan, the president of the Gypsy Council.

## Summit

He was joined by the council's vice-chairman Candy Sheridan and supporters from the settled community, including Father Dan Mason, the parish priest at Our Lady of Good Counsel in Wickford and parishioner Ann Kobayashi, a veteran campaigner and retired social worker.

Crays Hill residents Mike Bailey and Andy Peake also attended the summit, which took place at the House of Commons on



KEY DISCUSSIONS: Basildon council leader Tony Ball, John Baron MP, resident Mike Bailey, Candy Sheridan and Richard Sheridan at the summit to discuss Dale Farm in Crays Hill

Thursday.

Opening the meeting, which the Gazette was given permission to attend, Mr Baron said its purpose was to find a "peaceful resolution to the situation whilst ensuring that the law is enforced".

He also stressed that Basildon Borough Council was not singling out travellers for unfair treatment in its desire to clear Dale Farm.

"It is important that everybody

takes on board that this isn't an anti-traveller thing," Mr Baron said. "No one is looking to discriminate against travellers."

In reply, Mr Sheridan said he hoped an eviction could be avoided.

"The last thing anybody wants is an eviction," he said.

"I am just trying to make peace with all parties."

Councillor Ball said Basildon

Council would be willing to consider a planning application from the travellers for an alternative site in the borough.

However, both he and Mr Baron stressed that the majority of the occupants would need to find homes elsewhere in Essex or even further afield.

Ms Sheridan said she had identified two sites within the borough – one at Pound Lane in



PROBLEM SITE: Dale Farm

Laundon and another at Gardiners Lane in Basildon – that could potentially be used to accommodate some of the residents of Dale Farm.

But she said that finding other sites would be difficult, adding: "The planning system isn't a level playing field for our community."

Mr Baron pledged he would do what he could to help Ms Sheridan locate sites outside of the borough but stressed that the "political will" to clear the site in the spring remained.

A further meeting will now take place at the beginning of March, by which time it is hoped that further sites may have been identified.

## In brief

### Two donor sessions to give your blood

**BILLERICAY:** Help those in need of blood later this month. Blood donor sessions will take place at Christ Church in Perry Street on Tuesday, February 15.

The first session will run from 2pm until 3.45pm and the second will run from 5pm until 7.45pm.

■ Visit the National Blood Service's website at [www.blood.co.uk](http://www.blood.co.uk) or call 0300 123 23 23 to book an appointment to give a donation.

### Hospital staff powers

**DISTRICT:** Staff at Basildon Hospital will help police keep the building safe after they renewed their Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS) membership this week.

CSAS allows Essex Chief Constable Jim Barker-McCardle to accredit hospital staff with powers to tackle issues such as graffiti, litter, abandoned cars and antisocial behaviour.

Chief Inspector Rachel Nolan, the police's district commander for Basildon, said: "Essex Police have always had a close working relationship with the hospital, and I am pleased that the powers awarded under CSAS have been renewed."

### No sign of wild horse

**WICKFORD:** Police were called to reports of an untethered horse running wild in Cranfield Park Road yesterday morning.

Officers attended the scene at 7.15am but could find no trace of the horse.

## Warning over council tax refund scam

RESIDENTS in Billericay and Wickford are being urged to be vigilant amid reports of council tax scams.

The reminder from Basildon Borough Council comes following scam phone calls to residents last week.

The council received two calls from residents who received suspicious phone calls about a council tax refund.

In the reported incidents, the residents were told that they were owed an overpayment of council tax.

In order to transfer the supposed refund, they were asked to provide their bank details to the caller.

The residents alerted the coun-



BEWARE: Councillor Phil Turner

cil to the scam, which has been used in the past by tricksters looking to con people out of large sums of money.

Cabinet member for resources councillor Phil Turner said people should never give out bank details over the phone unless they are sure it is safe to do so.

He said: "There's no need for

people to be alarmed but, unfortunately, it seems this type of scam has not let up.

"We don't want to alarm people but I must remind residents not to give up their bank details unless they are positive the person on the phone is legitimate.

"In one of these cases, the alleged amount of overpaid council tax was quite substantial so I can understand how someone might think it is their lucky day.

"You do not have to explain yourself – if it doesn't feel right, put the phone down.

"You can get in touch with the council tax team to verify the caller is who they say they are."

The council tax team can be contacted on 01268 294544.

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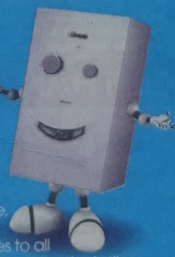
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